

SHOE ASSEMBLY, SHOE AND RELATED FOOTWEAR METHOD

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a shoe. This invention also relates to an associated shoe wearing method. This invention additionally relates to a shoe assembly.

- 5 Shoes are known that are provided with pockets for receiving keys and other items of personal property. Some shoes have pockets with transparent outer panels for enabling visual observation of the contents of the pocket. These pockets are all provided at locations determined by the manufacturer. Where a hook and loop type coupling is provided for releasable fastening of a label, pocket, or other element to a shoe, a fastener of barbed or hooked material is
- 10 connected to the shoe at a fixed location determined by the manufacturer.

OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a shoe and/or a shoe assembly or kit that facilitates a customization and/or personalization.

Another object of the present invention is to provide such a shoe that is comfortable.

- 15 A further object of the present invention is to provide such a shoe assembly that is easy to use.

It is a more particular object of the present invention to provide a shoe that enables a customized application of a logo, brand name, or other identification of source or sponsorship.

- 20 These and other objects of the invention will be apparent from the drawings and descriptions herein. Although every object is believed to be attained by at least one embodiment of the invention, there is not necessarily any one embodiment that achieves all objects of the invention.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A shoe in accordance with the present invention comprises a sole and an upper. The upper is made of a non-woven fleece material adapted for forming a releasable hook-and-loop-type coupling to a hooked or barbed material commonly marketed under the trademark

5 VELCRO. The invention enables a releasable attachment to the shoe, at virtually any desired location along the upper, of an ornamental element which is backed with the hooked or barbed material. More specifically, the VELCRO-backed ornamental element may be releasably secured to the upper at any of a plurality of locations and, at each location, in any of a multiplicity of orientations.

10 The ornamental element may be sold together with the shoe, thereby forming a shoe assembly. Indeed, the ornamental element may be one of a plurality of hook- or barb-backed ornamental elements included in a shoe box with the shoe. Two or more of the ornamental elements may be releasably attached to the upper at the same time. In that event, the ornamental elements may be positioned on the upper at different locations and orientations.

15 Each ornamental element may include a symbol, a graphic representation, and/or a linguistic expression. For example, an ornamental element attachable to a shoe upper in accordance with the present invention may exhibit a logo, a brand name, a person's name, a sports franchise symbol, and/or a comic-book character. An ornamental element as discussed herein may take the form of a geometrical design in one or more colors, a silhouette or cameo of
20 an animate object such as an animal, a silhouette or cameo of a manufactured item such as a car, a word or slogan, etc.

Several ornamental elements may be used together on a shoe to generate an ornamental pattern. For instance, where several ornamental elements carry respective words or symbols, the ornamental elements may be positioned in a recognizable sequence on a shoe upper to generate a

phrase or sentence. Words may be positioned adjacent to graphic representations to generate a composite message. The relative spacing and positions of the various ornamental elements on a shoe may be modified to generate messages of different meanings.

5 The ornamental elements may have shapes and colors to complement or contrast with the color and design of the shoe upper. For instance, a purple upper may be provided with red attachments or green attachments. The ornaments may be circular or zig-zag.

On an outwardly facing side, the ornamental elements may themselves be made of a fleece material, enabling attachment of one ornamental element over at least a portion of another element.

10 The present invention enables a wearer to personalize their shoes, for instance, by exhibiting any selected corporate or sports-franchise logo at any desired location on the shoe upper, including the side of the shoe, the back of the shoe, or even the metatarsal region. The ornamental elements on the shoe upper may be changed from day to day and may even effectuate a total redesign of the shoe's look and feel.

15 A shoe in accordance with the present invention is particularly effective as an athletic shoe. Ornamental elements may feature sports paraphernalia such as balls, gloves, bats, hockey sticks, helmets, skate boards, skis, ski poles, etc., or sports mascot representations such as birds, carnivorous cats, bears, etc., or sports franchise names or logos, etc.

20 Pursuant to a feature of the present invention, the shoe upper may be provided with a plurality of markings defining attachment locations for the ornamental element. The markings may be lines or dots on the shoe upper, which have an ornamental aspect when the shoe upper is not covered by ornamental attachments.

A shoe assembly in accordance with the present invention comprises a sole and an upper having an outer surface formed by a non-woven fleece material; and at least one ornamental

element provided with a hooked or barbed backing material for releasably fastening, via a hook and loop coupling, the ornamental element to the upper at any of a multiplicity of positions thereon.

5 The ornamental element may be made in part of a flexible material such as a woven or non woven fabric material, with the backing material being connected to the flexible material along one side thereof.

A footwear method in accordance with the present invention comprises providing a shoe having a sole and an upper made of a non-woven fleece material, placing the shoe on a foot, providing an ornamental element having a hooked or barbed backing material, and releasably
10 fastening the ornamental element to the upper at any of a multiplicity of positions thereon via a hook and loop coupling between the fleece material and the backing element.

Where the ornamental element is made in part of a flexible material, the backing material being connected to the flexible material along one side thereof, the fastening of the ornamental element to the upper may include bending the flexible material. This bending may be warranted,
15 for instance, where the ornamental element is attached to the rear of the shoe.

Where the upper is provided with a plurality of markings defining attachment locations for the ornamental element, the method further comprises attaching the ornamental element to the upper at one of the markings.

The method of the present invention may further comprise providing an additional
20 ornamental element having a respective hooked or barbed backing material and releasably fastening the additional ornamental element to the upper at any of a multiplicity of positions thereon via a hook and loop coupling between the fleece material and the respective hooked or barbed backing element.

The upper of a shoe in accordance with the present invention may be made out of a single layer of material or multiple layers. In the latter case, the outermost layer is the fleece material for forming the hook-and-loop type coupling with ornamental labels.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

5 Fig. 1 is a schematic side elevational view of a shoe in accordance with the present invention, showing a decorative patch carrying a logo attached to a side panel of the shoe at an arbitrary location thereon.

Fig. 2 is a schematic partial cross-sectional view taken along line II-II in Fig. 1, showing the side panel of the shoe upper and the decorative logo-bearing patch.

10 Fig. 3 is a schematic cross-sectional view on a larger scale of the decorative logo-bearing patch of Figs. 1 and 2.

Fig. 4 is a schematic rear elevational view of the shoe of Fig. 1, showing an alternative location for the decorative logo-bearing patch of Fig. 1.

15 Fig. 5 is a schematic side-elevational view of the shoe of Fig. 1, showing a set of alternative decorative patches attached to the shoe at arbitrary locations, pursuant to the present invention.

Fig. 6 is a schematic side-elevational view of the shoe of Fig. 1, showing another set of decorative patches attached to the shoe at arbitrary locations.

Fig. 7 is a schematic rear elevational view of the shoe and patches of Fig. 6.

20 Fig. 8 is a schematic side-elevational view of the shoe of Fig. 1, showing a further set of alternative decorative patches attached to the shoe at arbitrary locations.

Fig. 9 is a schematic rear elevational view of the shoe and patches of Fig. 8.

Fig. 10 is a schematic side-elevational view of the shoe of Fig. 1, showing an additional set of decorative patches attached to the shoe at arbitrary locations.

Fig. 11 is a schematic rear elevational view of the shoe and patches of Fig. 10.

Fig. 12 is a schematic side-elevational view of the shoe of Fig. 1, showing yet another set of alternative decorative patches attached to the shoe at arbitrary locations.

Fig. 13 is a schematic rear elevational view of the shoe and patches of Fig. 12.

5 Fig. 6 is a schematic side-elevational view of the shoe of Fig. 1, showing yet a further set of decorative patches attached to the shoe at arbitrary locations.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

As illustrated in Fig. 1, a shoe comprises a sole 12 and an upper 14. The shoe is typically an athletic shoe and may take the form of a so-called high-top sneaker, as indicated in phantom
10 lines at 15. Upper 14 has a metatarsal region 16, a pair of side panels 18 (only one shown) and a heel section 20. Upper 14, including metatarsal region 16, side panels 18 and heel section 20, is made in substantial part of a non-woven fleece material adapted for forming a releasable hook-and-loop-type coupling to a hooked or barbed material 22 that forms a backing layer of an ornamental element or patch 24 (see also Figs. 2 and 3). The hooked or barbed material 22 is
15 commonly marketed under the trademark VELCRO.

Upper 14 may comprise a single layer consisting of the fleece-type material.

Alternatively, upper 14 may be provided with one or more support layers 23 (Fig. 2) underlying the fleece material.

Ornamental element or patch 24 may be provided on an outer or cover layer 26 with a
20 logo or name of an athletic shoe manufacturer. In that case, patch 24 functions as a label. Other types of symbolic content may include a logo or name of a sports franchise or graphics pertaining to a particular type of sport.

The hooked or barbed material 22 of ornamental element or patch 24 enables a releasable attachment of the patch to the shoe, at virtually any desired location along upper 14. The

illustrated location (solid line) of ornamental element or patch 24 is on a side panel 18. Other equally arbitrary locations for attachment of ornamental element or patch 24 by the manufacturer, retailer or wearer, include a position 28 on the metatarsal region 16, a position 30 over a rear portion of the side panel 18 and a forward portion of the heel section 20, and a position 32 directly over the rear portion of the heel section 20. Thus, ornamental element or patch 24 may be releasably secured to upper 14 at any of countless locations and, at each location, in any of a multiplicity of orientations. Where the shoe has a high top 15, ornamental element or patch 24 may be releasably secured to upper 14, for instance, over an ankle of the wearer.

Ornamental element or patch 24, like any of the other patches described herein, may be sold together with the shoe, thereby forming a shoe assembly. Indeed, ornamental element or patch 24 may be one of a plurality of hook- or barb-backed ornamental elements included in a shoe box (not shown) with the shoe.

As illustrated in Fig. 5, two or more of ornamental patches 34, 36, 38, 40 bearing different ornamental designs, symbols, graphic representation, or linguistic expressions may be removably attached to upper 14 at the same time, at different locations and orientations on the upper. Patch 34 may exhibit a brand name, while patch 36 carries a trademark. Patch 38 may bear a slogan, while patch 40 carries a logo. Of course, the user is free to remove one or more of these ornamental patches 34, 36, 38, 40 at any time and optionally reattach them to upper 14 at different locations and/or orientations.

Figs. 6 and 7 show other kinds of VELCRO-backed ornamental elements or patches 42, 44, 46, 48 50 that may be attached to upper 14. Ornamental element or patch 42 bears a graphic representation of baseball paraphernalia; ornamental element or patch 44 carries a graphic representation of a sports mascot or comic character; ornamental element or patch 46 exhibits a

graphic representation of an automobile; ornamental element or patch 48 bears a logo; and ornamental element or patch 50 has a linguistic expression or message consisting of alphanumeric characters, for instance, "Eat the Frogs."

As depicted in Figs. 8 and 9, several specimens of the same ornamental element or patch 52 may be attached to upper 14 at respective locations and orientations. These patches 52 may bear the same design or symbol, but have different background colors, to form a resonant color scheme with the color of upper 14.

Figs. 10 and 11 illustrate that VELCRO-backed ornamental elements or patches 54, 56, 58, 60 removably attachable to upper 14 may have ornamental shapes that enable the wearer to customize the artistic design of the shoe. Patches 54, 56, 58, 60 in particular are elongate strips that provide a "racing" aspect to the shoe. In addition to having an ornamental shape, patch 56 is provided with a series of ornamental stars 62, while patches 58 and 60 carry slogans "Runners have more fun" and "Run for your life." Patches 54, 56, 58, 60 may have outer or cover layers (not separately designated) made of fleece material for enabling a hook and loop type coupling to one another, in addition to upper 14.

Figs. 12 and 13 provide another example of ornamental patches 64, 66, 68 and 70 having irregular ornamental shapes and optionally different colors, as well as patches 72 and 74 having upper or outer layers (not separately designated) made of a fleece-type material for enabling the attachment thereto of other ornamental elements such as patches 66 and 68.

According to Fig. 14, several VELCRO-backed patches 76, 78, 80 each bearing a respective symbol or word may be juxtaposed on upper 14 in such a manner as to generate a message. In this case, patch 76, carries a picture of an eye, while patch 78 bears a heart, commonly used to represent the word "love." Placed in a sequence with patch 80, which bears

the letter N and Y, these patches 76, 78, 80 communicate the message "I love New York."

Another patch 82 carries a political slogan or message.

Fig. 14 illustrates that several ornamental elements 76, 78, 80 may be used together on a shoe to generate an ornamental pattern. More specifically, where several ornamental elements 5 76, 78, 80 carry respective words or symbols, the ornamental elements may be positioned in a recognizable sequence on a shoe upper to generate a phrase or sentence. Words may be positioned adjacent to graphic representations to generate a composite message. The relative spacing and positions of the various ornamental elements on a shoe may be modified to generate messages of different meanings.

10 It is to be noted that upper 14 is made substantially of fleece-type material, meaning that a large portion of the upper's entire outer surface is available for the attachment of ornamental elements as discussed hereinabove. The user is therefore provided with numerous, if not numberless, possibilities for customizing the shoe as an expression of individuality. It is to be noted further that upper 14 may include one or more layers of materials. Inner layers (not 15 shown) may be made of materials other than the non-woven fleece material. It is only necessary that an outer layer of the upper be made of non-woven fleece material for forming hook-and-loop-type couplings with one or more ornamental patches.

The graphic designs disclosed herein, such as those on patches 42, 44, and 46 may take the form of a silhouette or cameo. Other possible ornamental content includes people's names 20 and sports franchise symbols. Ornamental elements as discussed herein may have geometrical shapes or carry geometrical designs in one or more colors.

Pursuant to a feature of the present invention, the shoe upper may be provided with a plurality of markings defining suggested attachment locations for the ornamental element. Thus, in Fig. 1, possible positions 28, 30, 32 may be marked by dot-dash lines on the upper 14 itself.

Alternatively, the upper may be covered with a maze of markings such as 90-degree corners (not shown) or dots (not shown) on the shoe upper, which have an ornamental aspect when the shoe upper is not covered by ornamental attachments.

A shoe as described herein has an upper 14 made substantially of a fleece-type material for enabling the removable attachment of VELCRO-backed patches and designs to the upper at virtually any desired location thereon. More particularly, a substantial portion, for instance, more than half, of the entire outer surface of upper 14 is made of the loop- or fleece-type material. Preferably, each region of the upper 14, namely, metatarsal region 16, sides 18, and heel section 20, is formed in substantial part of the fleece material on at least an outer surface. More preferably, the entire outer surface of the upper 14, with the possible exception of piping 84 and reinforcement strips 86, 88, and 90, is made of fleece-type material for forming a hook-and-loop-type coupling to a barbed or hooked material. This shoe structure provides the wearer with plenty of options in deciding where to place ornamental or logo-bearing patches. Piping 84 and reinforcement strips 86 and 88 disposed on the upper are optionally made of fleece material for forming a releasable loop-and-hook-type coupling with barbed or hooked material.

It is to be noted that the outer or cover layer 26 of an ornamental patch as described herein may be made of any of a wide variety of materials, including plastic, woven or non-woven fabric, and leather. Where the outer or cover layer of a first ornamental patch is made of non-woven fleece material, another VELCRO-backed ornamental patch may be removably attached in whole or in part over the first ornamental patch, as discussed hereinabove with reference to Figs. 10-13.

Although the invention has been described in terms of particular embodiments and applications, one of ordinary skill in the art, in light of this teaching, can generate additional embodiments and modifications without departing from the spirit of or exceeding the scope of

the claimed invention. Accordingly, it is to be understood that the drawings and descriptions herein are proffered by way of example to facilitate comprehension of the invention and should not be construed to limit the scope thereof.